

Natural Resources Conservation Service

CONSERVATION *Showcase*

USDA Helps Iraq War Veteran Enhance Conservation On Farm

by Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is helping Iraq War Veteran Adam Boge improve technology and other efficiencies in his new farming operation, allowing the Ventura farmer to prepare for long-term success in the first full year on his own.

Boge enlisted in the Army directly out of high school. After his initial military service, he attended Iowa State University for Ag Systems Technology and Mechanical Engineering. College was interrupted, however, by his Iraq deployment. Boge represented the Army National Guard's 1133rd Transportation Company out of Mason City for 15 months throughout 2003 and 2004 in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Upon his return to the United States, he continued his education and also began taking "hired hand" positions on farms near Ames. "That's when I started to think more

seriously about developing a business plan to someday take over a farm," he said. "Unless you're born into it, though, it is really difficult to capture farming ground."

His farming dream was delayed as he and his wife followed career opportunities to Illinois and Wisconsin. Boge landed an engineering job with Caterpillar Inc. in Illinois and then returned to active military service during the recession. But the farming itch never left Boge, as he returned to Iowa often to help family members during the planting and harvest seasons.

A Return to Iowa

In 2011, he jumped at the chance to return to Iowa to help a family member manage an 8,700-head hog facility in Hancock County, near Clear Lake in north central Iowa.

Back in Iowa and still yearning to farm, Boge learned that his respected neighbor, Dave Rosendahl, may soon be retiring from farming. He quickly put together a proposal and approached Rosendahl about it. "That's when things started to come together for me," said Boge.

While Rosendahl discussed the proposal with his family, Boge took an opportunity to learn more about Rosendahl's ridge till management system. He helped a neighbor, who also ridge tills, through the 2012 crop season, farming corn and soybeans in the Prairie Pothole region of Cerro Gordo County.

With ridge till, crops are planted in a seedbed prepared on ridges with sweeps, disk openers, coulters or row



Adam Boge



Filter strips, like the one NRCS District Conservationist Tony Moore (left) and Ventura farmer Adam Boge are standing in, helped Boge become eligible for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

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cleaners. Crop residue is left on the surface between the ridges. Crop residue management practices like no-till, strip-till and ridge till are extremely beneficial to reducing soil erosion from wind and water on farms near Clear Lake.

Prior to the 2013 planting season, Boge and Rosendahl formed a handshake agreement to crop share for three to five years, eventually handing over all day-to-day farming activities to Boge. However, that timeframe was quickly moved up. Boge said, "During the 2013 harvest Dave and I passed through the last bit of corn and Dave looked at me and said, 'Here are the reigns. I'm complete. I'm satisfied.'"

Boge says his plan was to take over a couple hundred acres, but Rosendahl was ready to give up all 980 acres covering nine farms and five landlords.

Conservation

As primary operator of the ground, Boge is now eligible to apply for local, state and federal conservation programs. Coincidentally, the 2014 Farm Bill provides benefits for Veterans like Boge who are beginning farmers.

Boge visited the USDA Service Center in Mason City and spoke with Tony Moore, district conservationist with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), about conservation planning and programs for his new operation. Moore recommended Boge apply for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural producers to undertake new conservation activities, called enhancements, and maintain and improve existing conservation systems.

When beginning Veteran farmers apply and receive eligibility for CSP, they are given priority status by NRCS to receive funding. Boge became CSP eligible on all 980 acres.

He credits Rosendahl for his CSP eligibility, considering Rosendahl implemented many conservation practices on the land throughout the years, including filter strips along drainage ways, natural wetlands for wildlife habitat, and years of soil saving with ridge till.



Following the 2014 soybean harvest, Boge knifes nutrients directly into raised ridges that are the signature of his farmland.

"I want to continue what Dave was doing," said Boge. "The way Dave farmed and took care of his land, I see no reason to change it. There is ground here that hasn't been ripped in 30 years. There is an unbelievable amount of soil tilth out there created by earthworm activity."

Moving forward, Boge is implementing an enhancement bundle he chose through CSP, which include widening stream buffers, and improving nutrient and pesticide application techniques. "A lot of it is updating the technology and making the operation more efficient," he said. "Updated GPS will ensure I don't over-apply nutrients and pesticides. CSP is allowing me to take the operation to another level."

Boge says he's appreciative of USDA support for Veterans trying to get a start in agriculture. "You spend time in a combat environment and come back, you think there isn't much you shouldn't be able to achieve, but you hit roadblocks and it gets discouraging after a while," he said. "As Veterans, we don't ask for much from our country. I wanted to achieve everything on my own, but when you sit down and look at the bottom dollar, maybe I needed a little help. If CSP is the way to get it, then that's OK."